Do interlocutors or conversation topics affect migrants' sense of feeling different when switching languages?[1]

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Abstract

A majority of multilinguals report feeling different when switching languages (Dewaele, 2016; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017). The present study focuses on feelings of difference when switching languages with specific categories of interlocutors (strangers, colleagues, friends, family, partner) and when discussing specific types of topics (neutral, personal, emotional). Statistical analyses revealed that 468 Italian migrants living in English-speaking countries feel more different when they use English to discuss emotional topics with less familiar interlocutors. Subsequent interviews with 5 participants and data from a survey open question pointed at migrants' affective socialisation within the new cultural environment, cultural orientation and other unique personal aspects as potential causes for this phenomenon.

Keywords: multilingual identities; multilingualism; self-perception in different languages; affective socialisation; emotions in different languages; migrants' identities

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Introduction

Many multilinguals feel that they harbour 'multiple selves' (Wierzbicka, 2004; Pavlenko, 2006). Ilan Stavans, the Mexican-American author, discussed the phenomenon in his autobiography:

> "Changing languages is like imposing another role on oneself, like being someone else temporarily. My English-language persona is the one that superimposes itself on all previous others. In it are the seeds of Yiddish and Hebrew, but mostly Spanish... But is the person really the same? You know, sometimes I have the feeling I'm not one but two, three, four people. Is there an original person? An essence? I'm not altogether sure, for without language I am nobody." (2001: 251)

Stavans' statement is striking because of the variation in the depth of the reported changes experienced when switching languages. The idea of a superficial "role" change emerges, reinforced by the stress the author gives to its temporary nature. However, the word "*persona*" used in the second sentence implies a bit more depth and permanence. The mention of "superimposition" suggests a struggle between the different *personas* trying to gain the upper hand. Stavans then moves to the more fundamental terms "person", "people" and "essence" in the next sentences. The reader visualises four different versions of him, bearing the same name but being separate people, behaving differently according to the language used, leading to the existential question whether there still is an original one. It highlights the idea of a complex, dynamic and hybrid multilingual self, torn between languages.

Research suggests that a large majority of multilinguals share Stavans' views but that they cannot always explain the phenomenon (Dewaele, 2016; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017; Pavlenko, 2005). With the Complementarity Principle, Grosjean (2010) suggests that bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people and that different aspects of life often require different languages (2015: 574). If biculturalism is intended to entail the synthesis of cultural norms from two groups into one behavioural repertoire and the ability to switch between cultural schemas, norms and behaviours in response to cultural cues, it seems that the Complementarity Principle applies also at a cultural level (Grosjean, 2015). When defining bicultural bilinguals, Grosjean (2015) specifies that the bicultural side is the blending of features of the cultures involved, relying on

both aspects that are adaptable and controllable, and aspects that are more static, as depicted by Stavans. This definition is based on the criterion that considers migrants as people who tend to synthesise aspects of their two or more cultures and on the possibility that the development of each component of the bicultural and bilingual person may take place at different times (2015: 578). Hence, part of the variation in feelings of difference when speaking different languages could be linked to situational change rather than language switching (Grosjean, 2010: 120). Can the sense of morphing into somebody else result from meeting a specific interlocutor, or discussing a particular topic in a different language?

The present study aims to explore Grosjean's observation about the effect of contextual factors on feelings of difference when switching languages. This paper further explores the database of 468 Italian first-generation migrants living in English-speaking countries (ESC) used in Panicacci and Dewaele (2017). After a brief literature review of the topic, methodology, instruments and research questions will be presented. A quantitative analysis will follow, supplemented by qualitative material, to give voice to individuals' experiences. Findings will be discussed in the final section.

Literature and Questions

Koven (2001) is a pioneer in the field of research focusing on feelings of difference among multilinguals. She produced evidence of what she called 'cultural frame switching' by eliciting stories from two French-Portuguese bilinguals. The informants were asked to tell the same story in both languages and were subsequently interviewed about the experience itself. The author found that bilinguals performed quite differently according to the language in use, suggesting that different languages allowed speakers to "perform a variety of cultural selves" (Koven, 2001: 513) through a variety of interlocutory tendencies, communicative strategies, discursive forms and styles.

Pavlenko (2006) carried out one of the main studies on self-image in different languages, using the feedback of 1039 multilinguals that had filled out the Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ), an instrument exploring language choice for emotions expression, cognitive operations and language perceptions among

multilinguals (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001-2003). The BEQ included an open-ended question investigating whether participants felt like a different person when switching languages (LXs). Two-thirds of participants responded affirmatively, which led the researcher to speculate that multilinguals might feel more authentic in their first language (L1) since it is the language in which they were most proficient. However, she found that participants who felt different when switching languages were not just late bilinguals, but they were also early bi- and multilinguals (p. 27). She observed that comparable changes in verbal and non-verbal behaviour when switching languages were interpreted differently by participants and that this was linked to "different discourses of bi/multilingualism and self" (p. 27). Pavlenko concluded that most multilinguals sensed a shift in personality, which could be perceived "as a source of both anguish and creative enrichment" (2006: 5). Most participants claimed that they felt more real in their L1 and increasingly fake in languages learned later in life, especially in emotionally charged circumstances, patterns confirmed in later research (Dewaele, 2013, 2015; Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005).

Wilson (2008, 2013) conducted a two-stage analysis into the relationship between personality and feelings when using an LX. She initially used the feedback from 1414 participants extracted from the BEQ to the same open question. Statistical analysis showed that female participants and highly educated participants were more likely to report feeling different when switching LXs. An analysis of the corpus revealed a highly frequent use of the adjective 'more'. It was recurrently used with themes such as Control/Lack of control (19%), Emotionality (14%) and Intellect (22%). The majority of respondents reported that using a foreign language had a positive effect on how they felt and acted. In the second stage, Wilson constructed a questionnaire blending a selection of statements reflecting the key themes in the BEQ corpus with a Big-Five questionnaire. The questionnaire was administrated to 172 British adult foreign language students at the Open University. Findings revealed a negative relationship between the trait Extraversion and the sense of feeling different when using any LX. Wilson speculated that operating in the LX gave more introverted respondents a sense of freedom: "A foreign language can give shy people a mask to hide behind even at fairly modest levels of proficiency" (Wilson, 2013: 8)

Following Wilson's (2008) research, Ożańska-Ponikwia (2012, 2013) focused on the

psychological correlates of feelings of difference, including Big-Five personality test and the Trait Emotional Questionnaire. Her investigation into 102 Polish immigrants in ESC revealed that gender and several personality traits, namely Extraversion, Openness and Conscientiousness, as well as Emotional Intelligence traits of Emotionality, Sociability, Emotion management, Emotion perception, Social awareness, Empathy and Emotion expression, were linked to the sense of feeling different while operating in the L2. She argued that bilinguals who were socially and emotionally skilled were also "better able to notice subtle changes in personality and behaviour while using the L2" (p. 152) and considered that:

> "self-confident individuals gradually build a large network of L2 interlocutors, which will speed up their L2 socialisation and contribute to the development of their L2." (p.19).

Furthermore, in a follow-up study focused on codeswitching practices, she discovered that participants tended to code switch mostly in emotionally charged situations as well as when discussing personal topics with known interlocutors (2016: 98).

Dewaele (2013) looked at language perceptions of 485 pentalinguals, extracted from the BEQ. He found a gradual decline in values from the L1 to the L5 for perceived usefulness, colourfulness, richness, poetic character and emotionality, which is to say that multilinguals felt that their L1 had higher values for each dimensions. A lower age of acquisition (AoA) and a higher frequency of use (FoU) also had a positive effect on all these dimensions. Specifically, participants who had learnt a language at younger age and used it frequently tended to consider it useful, rich, emotional, poetic and colourful. Dewaele (2013) speculated that the perceptions of the languages might be transferred to the perception of the self when using that language. In other words, multilinguals perceiving a language as colourful, rich, poetic and emotional might feel more colourful, rich, poetic and emotional when using that language.

Considering the relative indeterminacy of the term 'different', which might catch a constellation of vague feelings (Pavlenko, 2006), Dewaele and Nakano (2013) investigated how 106 multilinguals felt on a number of dimensions in their different languages (feeling logical, serious, emotional, fake and different). They carried out pairwise comparisons of scores on these dimensions between languages (L1/L2, L2/L3 and L3/L4). The analysis revealed a systematic shift across languages, with

participants feeling gradually less logical, serious and emotional as well as increasingly fake when using the L2, L3 and L4. Analysis showed that self-perceived proficiency was a significant predictor of shift on all the feelings scales in the L2 and on feeling fake in the L3 but had no effect on feelings in the L4. The authors argued that a certain mastery of a language is needed before developing feelings in it, hence the strongest effects in languages acquired earlier in life. AoA was not a significant predictor for any dimension in the L2 and L3 and only predicted the dimension of 'feeling different' in the L4. The most remarkable finding, corroborating the dynamic nature of this phenomenon, was the parallel effect on feeling both less logical and less emotional in languages acquired later.

A slightly different angle was taken by Dewaele (2015), who analysed the feedback from 1454 adult multilinguals – extracted from the BEQ, on language preferences for inner speech and for emotional inner speech. The author showed how inner speech and self-perceptions are strongly related. Participants reported using the L1 most frequently for inner speech and even more so for emotional inner speech. Although all other languages (LXs) were used less frequently, participants who had strongly acculturated into the LX considered the LX as a language of the heart. He speculated that multilinguals prefer a language that has particular emotional connotations. Indeed, multilinguals might resist using an LX for emotional inner speech because of the absence of social pressure to accommodate to the language of the interlocutors. Hence, he concluded that the choice of using more emotional inner speech in the LX could be interpreted as an indication of a conceptual restructuring and repositioning of the self: "multilinguals using more LX for emotional inner speech might have embraced a new sense of identity" (p. 14)

In a reaction to an off-the-cuff comment by McWhorter (2014) that feelings of difference in different languages are linked to a late AoA of the LX and that not being fully proficient limits LX users' ability to express their full emotional and pragmatic range, Dewaele (2016) analysed BEQ data from 1005 bi- and multilinguals. While some participants claimed that their limited proficiency in the LX was related to a sense of feeling different, no statistically significant relation emerged between the sense of difference experienced when shifting languages and self-reported proficiency in the LX. Similar results emerged between FoU in the LX and feelings of difference.

The only variables that were linked to informants' sense of feeling different when switching languages were age, education level and anxiety when speaking with colleagues or over the phone. This study also provided varied qualitative observations, showing that perceptions could change over time and differed enormously between individuals.

Mijatović and Tytus (2016) investigated the effects of biculturalism and personality traits on individuals' sense of feeling different when switching language. In particular, in their examination of introspective data from 88 German-English bilinguals, the authors found that 4 main categories were giving rise to this feeling, namely cultural differences, language proficiency, 'breaking free' from the L1 personality and changes in personality due to reactions of interlocutors. Qualitative data indicated that the LX could disclose "new possibilities" (p. 9), in the sense that it could act as a liberating force allowing the speakers to escape from personality characteristics associated with the L1, especially in emotional situations. Finally, some participants detected changes in the perception of their interlocutors when using the LX. The authors commented:

> "Previously, observations by interlocutors were mainly used to argue for the reliability of self-reports, whilst in this study, they have served as an explanation for the dependent variable." (p. 10)

Connecting the roles of emotionality and interlocutors, Dewaele and Salomidou (2017) investigated whether language and cultural differences within crosscultural couples made emotional communication more difficult. Despite not directly examining participants' sense of feeling different when using the LX, qualitative and quantitative observations revealed a variety of comments about self-perceptions, with over half of the participants mentioning the constraints of the LX while a quarter reported emotional liberation in it. Opinions were divided with a third of participants claiming no difficulty in emotional communication with their loved ones and half mentioning limitations due to a lack of emotional resonance of the LX. A minority reported experiencing a lack of genuineness at the start of the relationship, generally fading over time. Interestingly, longer relationships led to affective socialisation in the LX and the partner's language often became the language of the heart.

Finally, Panicacci and Dewaele (2017) used the database of 468 Italian migrants on which the present paper is based to investigate the link between personality characteristics and their sense of belonging to either the heritage or host culture. Feelings of difference when using English were found to be significantly lower for participants scoring high on Emotional Stability and Social Initiative. A looser attachment to the host culture also corresponded to weaker feelings of difference. Though the effect sizes for personality and cultural orientation were small, they confirmed the hypothesis that feelings of difference are linked to a large number of interacting independent variables. Interviews with participants confirmed the awareness of personality changes following migration, especially in the form of enhanced ability to empathise with members of different cultures and being more open towards diversity.

What previous research emphasised is the strong connection between feelings of difference in the LX and multilinguals' emotional experiences. However, multilinguals often struggled to identify the factors affecting their perceptions when switching languages. What emerges both from the literature and multilinguals' personal insights is the dynamic nature of feelings of difference when switching languages, as they change over time. The present study aims to investigate whether contextual factors not directly related to multilinguals' personality or dispositions, like the type of interlocutors with which they socialise or the topic of their conversations, might have any influence on this phenomenon. Specifically, this paper will answer the following questions:

(1) Are feelings of difference when using the LX linked to the type of interlocutor?
(2) Are feelings of difference when using the LX linked to the topic of conversation?

Methodology

Participants

Participants are 468 Italian migrants (321 females and 147 males) from the United Kingdom (n = 360), Ireland (n = 48), the United States (n = 56) and English-speaking provinces from Canada (n = 4). The average age is 34 (SD = 9), ranging from 18 to 73

years old. They were highly educated: 62 obtained a high school diploma, 124 an undergraduate degree, 177 a postgraduate degree and 105 a doctoral degree. The majority of participants were born in Italy (n = 449) while some were born in another country (n = 19). Participants mostly came from fully Italian families (n = 440) and only a few reported to have a bicultural family (n = 28). The average age of migration is 27, ranging from 0 to 53 (SD = 7); while the average number of years spent in an ESC is 7, ranging from a few months to 68 years (SD = 9). The sample appeared to be highly multilingual: excluding 170 people, who only speak Italian and English; 155 could speak a third language; 96 speak four languages; 35 speak 5 languages; 10 people speak 6 languages; 1 participant speaks 7 languages and 1 participant 8 languages. Considering migrants' intimate relationships, 270 migrants did not have a partner at time of testing, 111 participants reported to speak 1 language only with their partner; 67 reported sharing 2 languages with him/her; 17 reported using 3 languages in their relationship and 3 people reported using up to 4 languages with their loved ones. Finally, means for LX self-perceived proficiency (measured on a 5-point scale) were relatively high: *M* Speaking = 4.19, *M* Listening = 4.31, *M* Reading = 4.56, *M* Writing = 4.20.

Five UK-based participants took part in interview sessions. All candidates chose to be interviewed in English. While selecting candidates, the aim was to gather as diverse sociobiographical profiles as possible. A resume of their profiles is presented below:

- Simone, 33, was the only male participant. He migrated to London at 28 to follow his Italian fiancée and seek work opportunities.
- Donata, 45, came from a village on the Austrian border. She moved to London at 26 and also lived elsewhere. Her British husband and son spoke Italian fluently.
- Francesca, 42, lived abroad since she was 24. She has been living in London with her Egyptian-British husband and 5-year-old son for 13 years.
- Federica, 35, lived with her Welsh-partner in Chester. She left Italy at 29 and defines her experience an "emotional migration" that led her to find her ideal habitat.
- Livia was a 28-year-old PhD student in love with English language. She migrated to London when she was a teenager to study it.

The Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire

Data for the present study were gathered through a web questionnaire, advertised through several Social Network Websites, targeted emails and informal contacts asking them to forward the link to colleagues and friends. The researchers had no control about who received the call for participation. The first section of the survey collected background information. Participants filled out a short socio-biographical questionnaire with questions about gender, age, education, language history and use. The second section relied on the BEQ (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001-2003). Participants where asked whether they felt different when using English (LX) with some categories of interlocutors (strangers, colleagues, friends, family and partner) and about different topics (neutral, emotional and personal). An optional open-ended question was added to let migrants voice their self-perceptions when using the LX in detail. Feedback on the first question was coded on a Likert scale ranging from: (0) N/A, (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) frequently, (5) all the time. The option '*N/A*' was included, in order to distinguish those who cannot face that specific circumstance (e.g. they do not have a partner, they do not have colleagues, etc.) from those who faced the circumstance and do not feel different when using L2 with that category of interlocutors. Responses for the second question were coded in the same way. In this instance, no N/A option was provided.

Self-reported feelings of difference when using the LX with different interlocutors and for different topics are the dependent variables in the present study. The Cronbach α revealed a high level of internal consistency in the Feeling Different questionnaire: .857.

Data were tested for normality by means of a series of one-sample Shapiro–Wilk tests. The values for the sense of feeling different with interlocutors and with topics were not normally distributed ($p < .000$ for all tests). Skewness values for feeling different with interlocutors and about topics were, respectively, ranging from 0.46 to 1.51 and from 0.14 to 0.77 ($SD = 0.11$), while Kurtosis values were, respectively, ranging from -0.89 to 1.48 and from -0.29 to -1.18 ($SD = 0.26$). The distribution of answers regarding interlocutors were less skewed for strangers, colleagues and friends categories and skewed towards the low end of the continuum for the family and partners categories, mainly because a large number of participants did not have a

partner or a family of their own. The distribution of answers regarding topics were skewed towards the low end of the continuum for the neutral topic category, less skewed for the personal topic category categories and skewed towards the high end of the continuum for the emotional topic category. As a result, we opted for non-parametric statistics.

Procedure

The present research relies on a design that combines emic and etic perspectives, where qualitative data are collected in support of pre-identified quantitative trends (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Qualitative observations are used to illustrate statistical findings, with the purpose of creating a more reliable picture of the psychological and sociolinguistic changes involved in migrants' language use. Hence, after the quantitative data collection, a follow-up session of semi-structured interviews was set up as an attempt at giving participants a voice. These interviews were designed on the basis of initial statistical trends and open question codes. Each interview was an individual session, lasting between 1 and 2 hours. Qualitative items thus served the purpose of providing the researchers with emerging themes and quotes to be used to explain quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Results

Quantitative findings

Interlocutors

Overall, over a third of participants said that they feel different when using the LX with different interlocutors and only 146 participants claimed that they never feel different when speaking LX. A Friedman's ANOVA test revealed that there was a statistically significant effect of interlocutors on feelings of difference: $\chi^2(4) = 493.4$, $p < .000$. Informants tended to feel most different when using the LX with strangers ($M = 2.27$, SD = 1.3); slightly less different when talking to colleagues ($M = 2.11$, SD = 1.3) and friends ($M = 2.18$, SD = 1.3) and they reported feeling no difference when using the LX with family ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 1.4$) or partners ($M = 1.18$, SD = 1.3). The decline in values from 'stranger' to 'partner' categories was almost monotonic (Table 1).

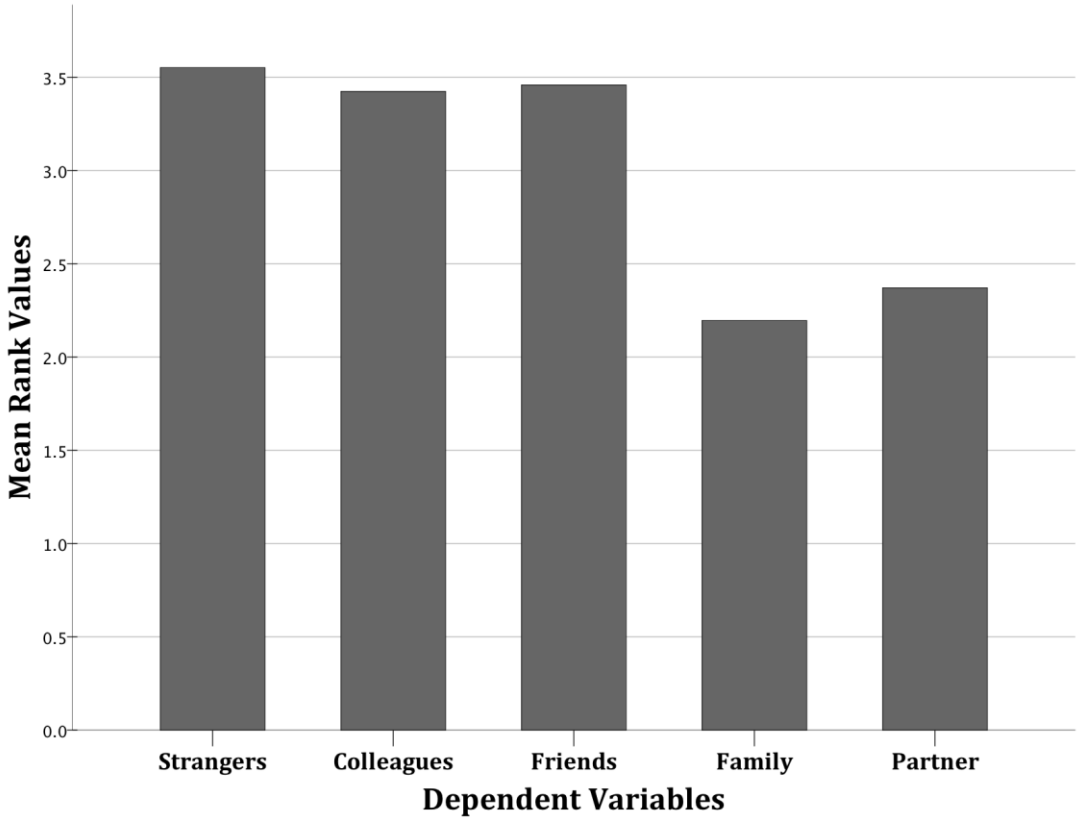
Table 1

Friedman ANOVA test (Mean ranks for Feeling Different with Interlocutors)

	Categories	*M*
Interlocutors	strangers	3.55
	colleagues	3.42
	friends	3.46
	family	2.20
	partner	2.27
Topics	neutral	1.68
	personal	2.05
	emotional	2.27

Figure 1

Feeling different with interlocutors



Post-hoc analyses with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted in order to identify the differences between categories of interlocutors and to calculate effect sizes. A Bonferroni correction was applied, resulting in a significance level set at $p <$ .005, according to the number of tests performed.

Table 2

Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (Feeling Different with Interlocutors)

	Str. – Col.	Str. – Fri.	Str. – Fam.	Str. – Par.	Col. – Fri.	Col. – Fam.	Col. – Par.	Fri. – Fam.	Fri. – Par.	Fam. – Par.
Z	-2.85	-1.67	-12.47	-11.82	-1.06	-11.26	-10.50	-12.41	-12.05	-2.53
p	.004	.094	.000	.000	.287	.000	.000	.000	.000	.011
r	-.093	-.055	-.407	-.387	-.034	-.368	-.343	-.406	-.394	-.083
Effect Size	0.08%	N/S	16.6%	14.9%	N/S	13.6%	11.8%	16.6%	15.5%	N/S

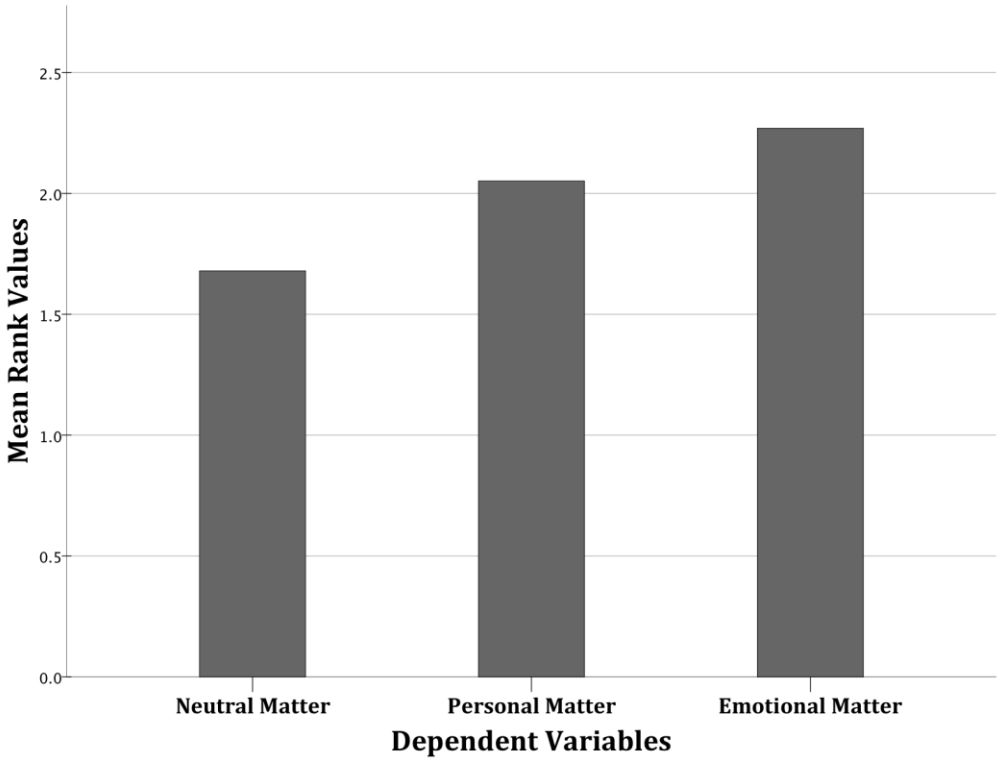
We found a statistically significant reduction in self-perceived difference when using the LX between most categories of interlocutors with only a few exceptions (see Table 2). Excluding the first pair of categories, the type of interlocutor accounted for an average variance of 12.7% in migrants' feelings of difference when using the LX, thus reflecting a small to medium effect size (cf. Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

Topics

More than 70% of participants reported feeling different when discussing the topics listed in the LX. A second Friedman's ANOVA test revealed a statistically significant effect of conversation topic on feelings of difference: $\chi^2(2) = 178.5$, $p > .000$. Personal and emotional topics elicited greater feelings of difference with a monotonic increase (Table 1, Figure 2). Participants stated they felt less different when using the LX to talk about a neutral topic ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.1$) and progressively more different when discussing a personal topic ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.2$) and an emotional topic ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.3$).

Figure 2

Feeling different with topics



Post-hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted and a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significance level set at $p < .017$. The analysis showed a statistically significant increase in self-perceived difference when using the LX between all topic categories (Table 3). Effect sizes were generally medium (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014): the type of topic accounted for a variance ranging from 5.4% and 10.8% in migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX.

Table 3

Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (Feeling Different with topics)

	Neutral – Personal	Neutral – Emotional	Personal – Emotional
Z	-8.05	-10.07	-7.07
p	.000	.000	.000
r	-.263	-.329	-.231
Effect Size	6.9%	10.8%	5.4%

A series of Kruskall-Wallis H tests were computed considering each topic as the independent variable and analysing whether there was any significant difference among interlocutor categories according to the topic selected.

Table 4

Kruskall-Wallis H test (Feeling Different – Interlocutors/Topic)

		Strangers	Colleagues	Friends	Family	Partner
Neutral topic	$\chi 2$ (4)	226.6	178.6	170.8	6.4	2.4
	p	.000	.000	.000	.167	.649
Personal topic	$\chi 2$ (4)	198.67	186.42	198.38	2.267	12.605
	p	.000	.000	.000	.687	.013
Emotional topic	$\chi 2$ (4)	178.57	158.90	178.54	6.181	17.216
	p	.000	.000	.000	.186	.002

A statistically significant difference in participants' self-perceptions when talking with strangers, colleagues and friends in the LX emerged between their feeling different scores when talking about a neutral topic (Table 4). Specifically, high scores for feeling of difference when talking about a neutral topic tended to decrease when talking to more intimate interlocutors (figure 3a).

A statistically significant difference in participants' self-perceptions when talking with strangers, colleagues, friends and partner in the LX also emerged between their feeling different scores when talking about personal topics and emotional topics (Table 3). The sense of feeling different when talking about a personal topic tended to decrease when talking to more intimate interlocutors (figure 3b). Conversely, the pattern of feelings of difference when talking about an emotional topic was less linear compared the other topics. This might be due to the fact that emotional topics are more rarely discussed with less intimate interlocutors and could still create a higher situation of stress with more familiar interlocutors (figure 3c)

Figure 3a

Feelings of difference when talking about a neutral topic change between interlocutors

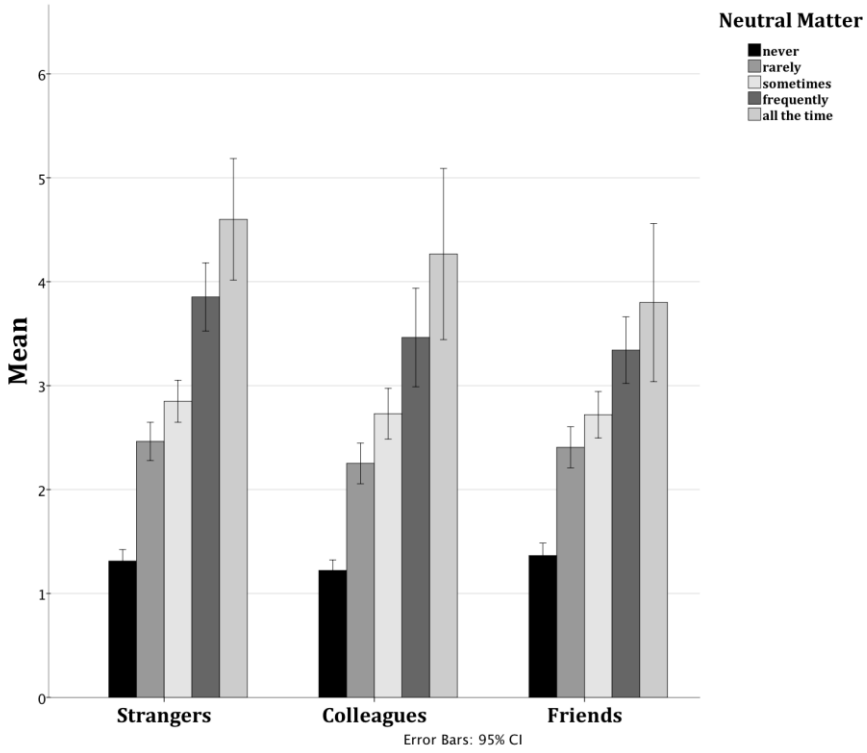


Figure 3b

Feelings of difference when talking about a personal topic change between interlocutors

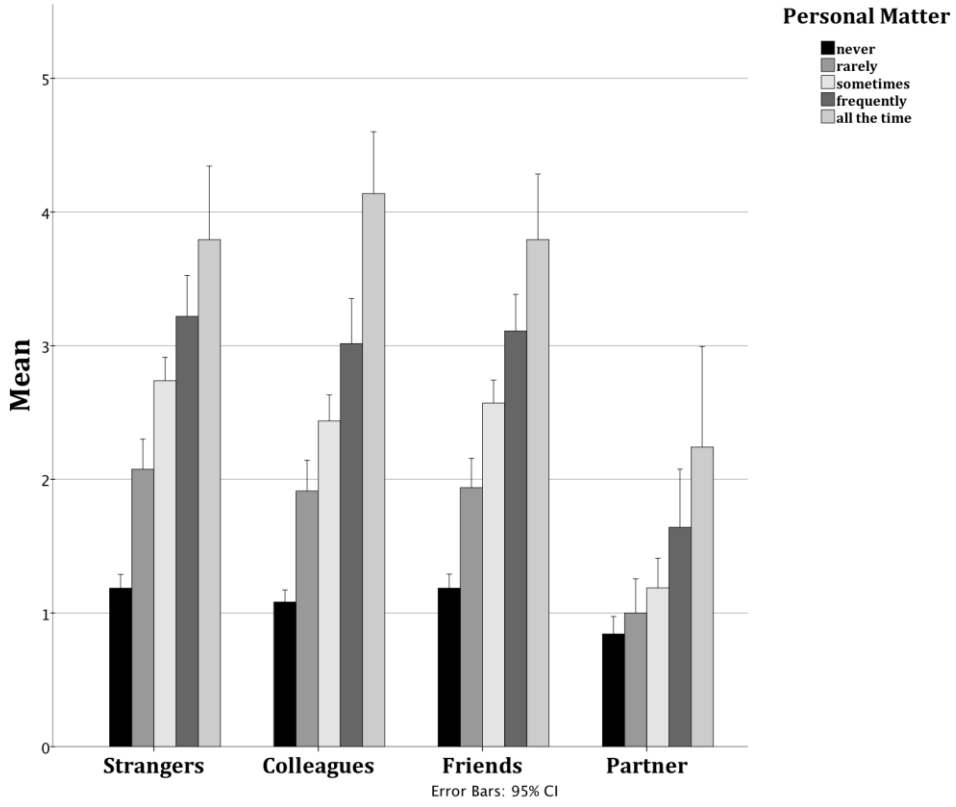
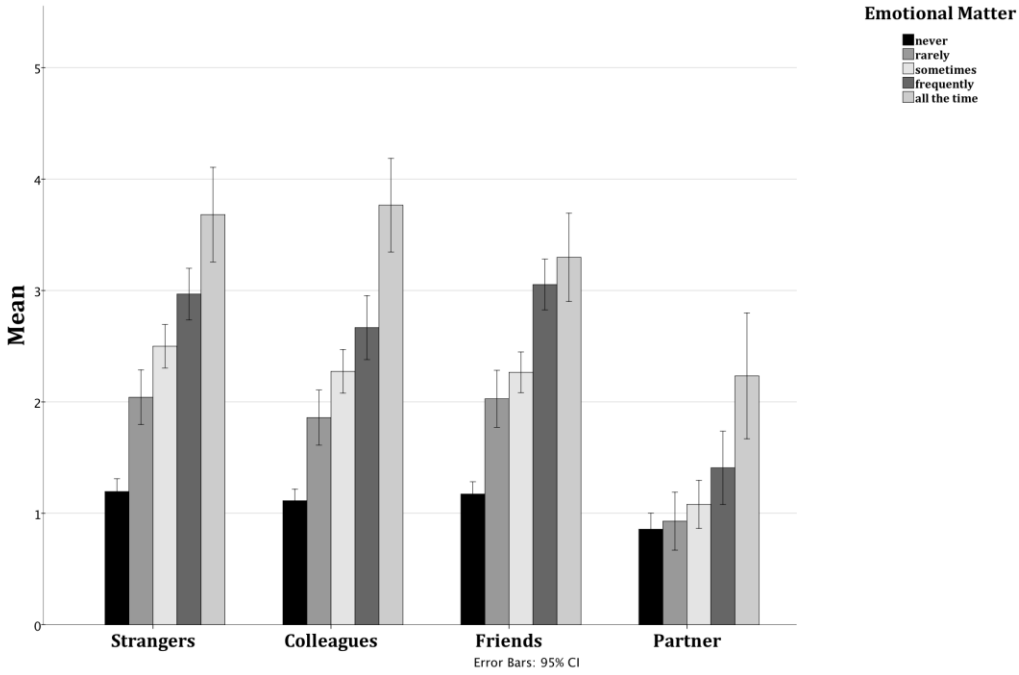


Figure 3c

Feelings of difference when talking about an emotional topic change between interlocutors



Qualitative findings

The open question in the survey aimed at investigating the nature of migrants' self-perceptions when using the LX. The responses of 303 participants, together with the insights from the 5 interviews have been coded considering the categories of interlocutors and topics (Table 5). Informants mainly said that they felt different when talking about emotional topics. Typically, they experienced negative emotions, rarely referring to positive feelings. Participants also stated feeling different when using the LX with strangers and less often with colleagues, friends, family members and partners. Personal and neutral topics were less frequently mentioned in relation to feeling different.

We will start with the most recurrent theme in migrants' narratives, namely emotions, and then move to their comments on personal and neutral topics. Insights about interlocutors generally surfaced in relation to different topics of conversation; they will be thus integrated in the topic sections. Migrants' reports from the survey and the interviews will be presented together.

Table 5

Number of participants' observations focusing on interlocutors or topics

Theme Categories	Total observations	Sub-categories	Total observations
Emotional topics	221	Negative emotions	202
		Positive Emotions	19
Interlocutors	61	strangers	24
		colleagues	14
		friends	13
		family	11
		partner	7
Personal topics	57	N/A	37
Neutral topics	36	N/A	36

Emotional Topics

Participants often focused on the difficulty of expressing emotions going from a general lack of intimacy up to a deep sense of frustration. One recurrent facet of this phenomenon was the assumption that the L1 had an emotionally stronger evocative power:

> EB (male, 30, US)[2]: "Italian language is definitely more rich and 'dramatic'"

Some participants dug deeper into cultural and cognitive aspects of their perceptions when expressing emotions in English:

> MV (female, 36, US): "I do think that English may be colorful, rich and poetic, but often offers [...] expressions that do not fully describe my views or emotions. I guess Italian language might have shaped those emotions in the first place"

Federica, in her interview, admitted questioning her personal feelings in several occasions, as English severely attenuated her perception of affection:

[2] Participants' names have been presented in full or in the form of initials, according to their preference.

> "When it comes to more sentimental things sometimes [...] I do feel like that if I am speaking in dialect I give more meaning to what I am saying. I'm not really feeling good cause [...] sometimes I was asking myself if I was sincere about my feelings"

Donata, who had suffered a tragic event in her life, found herself unable to express her suffering in English and psychologically reverted to her Italian roots:

> "I was struggling with the language... to express what I was feeling. During that period I was going towards my Italian persona [...] language-wise I was reverting more to Italian. I felt not understood here... what I was suffering could not be expressed in English"

In her interview, she admitted feeling a strong emotional attachment to Italian language and regretted that her lack of pragmatic calibration when expressing emotions in English conveyed a defective image of herself:

> "My existence here is more practical than emotional. I chose to do therapy in Italian and my emotional language is Italian [...] In English [...] it happened that my arguing was taken as [...] very aggressive, while I don't think I'm an aggressive person"

Other participants from the survey experienced a similar lack of regulation in their emotional reactions:

> PMG (female, 42, UK): "I feel that I am a different person when I speak English, Italian and French about personal and emotive matters. My voice, apparently, changes also [...] I feel less in control, more emotional"

However, this sense of emotional mismatch was not always depicted as a negative experience. Some respondents expressed appreciation for the way the LX toned down their temper:

> Valentina (female, 20, UK): "I feel more confident and I can express myself better, with the right words. Maybe this is because I very often think beforehand what to say in English about emotional matters, whereas in Italian the emotions take over"

> Federica (interview): "I'm calm and more polite if I'm talking in English […] Words like 'thank you', 'sorry', 'I love you' are much easier […] they do feel different. If I speak English, I sound much more open and able to deal with emotions than if I talk in Italian"

Sometimes, qualitative reports from introverted participants suggested that the

linguistic detachment when speaking the LX allowed them to feel less exposed when discussing intimate matters. The lack of affective engagement with the language created a sort of protection:

> CDP (female, 23, Ireland): "I noticed I tend to use English when the matter is somewhat hard for me to express (emotional matters), I guess it's a way for me to distance myself from what I'm saying and making it more bearable to express."

Interlocutors of intimate topics

Occasionally, migrants described their sense of constraint when discussing emotional topics in the LX as changing according to the interlocutors they are interacting with:

> Irene (female, 47, US) "When I speak Italian I feel more passionate and I talk loud while gesturing at the same time. When I speak English I tend to be more emotionally controlled, trying to speak more quietly and I don't move my hands as much. So I feel a significant emotional difference with each language I speak, and most importantly with the person/people I speak with."

Francesca, in her interview, talked about her experience of going out with a British friend:

> "I have to construct my phrases, I'm not entirely relaxed, whereas if I'd gone with an Italian friend I would have been more relaxed and also... it would have been easier to laugh about things or to say jokes. In that sense the real me the... the emotional me is still Italian."

However, participants felt mostly different when using the LX with unknown individuals or acquaintances:

> Alessandra (female, 46, US): "I feel like I cannot express what I really feel [...] Sometimes I feel like a stranger even when I'm with my American friends, but above all with strangers."

In some instances, informants considered their poor affective socialisation in the host country as the reason for their emotional disengagement with the LX. In other words, the type of interlocutors individuals have the chance to relate to determined their perception of the language:

AB (male, 42, UK): “Sometimes, I do not feel any emotional response attached to English [...] I do use emotions as an actor would do [...] I do use English almost only for professional purposes and social exchange with people whom I do not know personally or to whom I do not feel any particular personal attachment.”(Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017)

Considering that the majority of participants migrated to pursue work opportunities, conversations with colleagues seemed to represent an essential part of their lives. Some respondents regretted that speaking English only with colleagues prevented them for developing a higher emotional attachment to the language:

DG (male, 30, UK): “I am afraid to appear a less brighter person than I believe to be [...] I don't have proper friends with which speaking English, but just flatmates, acquaintances and colleagues.”

Indeed, speaking with intimate LX interlocutors was highlighted as a positive experience, able to enhance respondents’ confidence:

Francesca (female, 33, UK): “I feel positive while speaking with people who are very close to me. In other cases, I feel nervous.”

Lots of participants experienced a sense of artificiality when using English with familiar interlocutors, who supposedly were mostly Italian:

RP (female, 45, UK): “I guess sometimes I feel like I have to speak Italian with my friends because speaking in English sounds odd.”

LM (female, 28, Ireland): “I feel like a different person when speaking English with my Italian people, those who have known me for a long time [...] English is not the language we use to communicate each other.”

A few respondents experienced the same reaction with their family members:

Enrico (male, 21, UK): “I feel like a different person talking in English with my parents whatever the topic [...] it is kind of awkward when it happens.”

Precisely, some migrants explained they speak Italian with their family only for emotional reasons:

EB (female, 38, UK): “If I have to speak English with my children [...] I feel it doesn't belong to me. English is not part of my family persona. It feels awkward and unpleasant.”

The situation is a little different when a foreign partner is involved. Indeed, some migrants claimed they felt progressively more emotionally engaged in English as it is the language they shared with their companion:

> ML (female, 28, Ireland): "I feel almost more confident talking about emotional matters in English, since I usually share my feelings with my partner."

Yet, when Livia discussed in her interview how, after a relationship with a British partner, she ended up together with someone from her hometown, she expressed a strong sense of emotional liberation:

> "It is not random occurrence that now I am hanging out with someone from my home town [...] after a big relationship with someone that was very British and very kind of guarded [...] I don't have to explain my emotions. Oh we do have ridiculous fights! We fight and we laugh at the top of strong emotions [...] that's good to me, that's something I need."

Neutral and Personal topics

Responses mentioning personal and neutral matters and were overall less common, but still present in migrants' voices:

> Martina (female, 30, UK): "When I am talking about personal stuff [...] I find that I either lack the exact word to describe my state/condition or there isn't a good enough word to describe it."

Once again, some informants linked their self-perceptions to cultural aspects:

> DT (male, 43, UK): "Absorbing and integrating with a different culture has certainly changed my behaviour and attitudes. I feel that I have come to conform to what (I think) English people expect [...] For instance, I sometimes refrain on purpose from talking about certain topics, and/or in a certain way (more or less openly on personal matters)"

Yet, some informants lamented their inability to add personal shades to general topics and reported feelings of frustration:

> Ilaria (female, 29, UK): "I feel slightly different because sometimes, especially for neutral topics, I'm not able to transfer my point of view as effectively as I do in Italian."

Other participants felt positive about this, as if they could strategically use the

language to hide their real thoughts:

> GV (male, 25, UK): "When talking about neutral matters, I sometimes want to hide my opinions on that matter. I think English provides more 'neutral' words to accomplish the task than Italian."

Interlocutors of neutral topics

Some responses focused on interlocutors, highlighting a different approach to neutral conversations:

> RT (male, 27, UK): "In Italian I can easily start a conversation starting from something neutral. In English it can take more time in particular if I the person is not my close friend."

In contrast, Simone in his interview explained how small talk and jokes in English with colleagues and friends resulted in more natural interactions:

> "I got a kind...the kind of approach they have so if I wanna, if I wanna make a joke...uh for sure I will try to um...just say as they do it ... like...poses and rhythm, yeah it's really... It became natural to me."

Resuming migrants' narratives

Summarising the findings, participants clearly voiced an increased sense of difference when having to deal with emotional topics in the LX, thus confirming statistical results. Comments on interlocutors were definitely different. In fact, participants often mentioned feeling extremely unnatural when contemplating the possibility of using the LX with their children or intimate friends. However, they generally admitted their most intimate relationships were with people from their own heritage; hence, conversations with close friends, family and children mostly took place in their L1. These considerations might explain why statistical results are indicating strangers and colleagues as the categories where the sense of feeling different is higher.

Discussion

Statistical analyses revealed a significant effect of the type of topic and of interlocutor on migrants' self-perceptions when using English LX. Specifically, participants tended to feel different when operating in English with less familiar interlocutors. In

their words, they explained that conversations with strangers lowered their confidence, triggering a higher level of anxiety (Dewaele, 2016), often accompanied by the fear of appearing less funny or dull (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Mijatović & Tytus, 2016). English LX was typically used with strangers, work colleagues and mere acquaintances. This could also explain the lack of feelings of difference when interacting with more intimate interlocutors. It could thus be argued that the migrants resisted perceiving English as a language of the heart because of the absence of emotional pressure to accommodate to the language of the interlocutors (Dewaele, 2015; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012, 2013, 2016; Panicacci & Dewaele; 2017). Clearly, a limited affective socialisation in English prevented them from developing a higher emotional attachment to the new language. However, some participants who were in a romantic relationship with an English-speaker felt perfectly at ease in expressing their emotions in English, confirming earlier research (Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017).

The topic of conversation was shown to have a significant effect on migrants' self-perceptions. More intimate topics discussed in English increased participants' feelings of difference. Qualitative data revealed that participants very often indicated a strong emotional mismatch as the main reason of their sense of feeling different when using English. Some participants considered their L1 as the unique language of their heart, often depicting English as emotionally poorer (Pavlenko, 2006; Dewaele, 2013, 2015). Also, they expressed a sense of emotional constraint when using English that led them to believe they were conveying a distorted image of themselves to their interlocutors (Mijatović & Tytus, 2016). Occasionally, some participants felt positive about the lack of emotional engagement when interacting in English, as this allowed a more confident expression of intimate matters (Wilson, 2008, 2013). Not surprisingly, the combined effect of interlocutors and topics significantly affected participants' self-perceptions. Qualitative reports confirmed Grosjean's (2015) observation that feelings of difference are linked to situational changes. This also confirms previous findings on the reasons behind codeswitching, allowing individuals to choose the language that suits their emotional needs at that moment in time (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2016; Rolland, Dewaele & Costa, 2017).

The qualitative material highlighted the uniqueness of participants' interpretations of the phenomenon of feeling different. Some viewed it positively, others felt frustrated,

some linked it to cultural aspects while others mentioned their affective socialisation within their host culture. The current findings complement Panicacci and Dewaele's (2017) analysis of the relationships between the sense of feeling different and some personality traits. The sense of difference relates not only to relatively stable internal characteristics of the migrants like their personality and their degree of socialisation in the LX but also to lower-level variables such as conversation topics or interlocutors.

We are aware of the limitations of this research. Firstly, our sample was composed of first-generation of migrants who mainly migrated in their adulthood. Many of them still had strong intimate relationships with compatriots and some did not have a family of their own or a partner. Furthermore, the relatively indeterminate expression 'feeling different' could have been interpreted slightly differently by participants (Dewaele, 2016). The interviews have allowed us to gain a better understanding of a number of participants' unique understanding and insights of the phenomenon.

Conclusion

The originality of the present study lies in the finding that feelings of difference when using the LX vary according to conversation topic and interlocutor. Whereas previous research investigated feelings of difference in a generic manner, the present study has shown that extra contextual information can help us develop a better and more nuanced understanding of the ephemeral feelings of difference, also contributing to offer a more realistic picture of migrants' degree of LX affective socialisation. Our participants showed that self-perceptions could be contradictory in terms of perceived emotionality and rationality when using the LX (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013). They could change over time and vary according to interlocutors and topics, reflecting participants' linguistic and cultural hybridity (Grosjean, 2015). Further research could investigate how migrants' affective socialisation in the LX and their language choice for emotion expression in the L1 and the LX reflect their self-perceptions.

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